

Muslims in america



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Population

So far, there are no official, accurate figures concerning the actual number of Muslims living in the United States. Estimates have ranged from as low as less than three million to as high as over six million. This is understandable because the statistics being released by the census bureau do not include religion as a category. As far as the census figures are concerned, therefore, Muslims could have been counted as Asians, Arabs, Africans, or even Europeans (Mujahid).

Independent observers believe that the figures being released to media depend on the partiality of the source. For instance, David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, claimed that the number of Muslims living in the United States as of 2001 did not exceed 2.8 million – a figure which was way below the estimates submitted by several researchers. This statement was immediately contradicted by Ibrahim Hooper.

Speaking on behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Hooper argued that the report which was generated by a review commissioned by the American Jewish Committee was a “desperate attempt to discount the role of American Muslims.” The debate appears inconclusive since the figures released by Harris and the American Jewish Committee might just prove inaccurate if one considers that the review was done in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks – which everybody knows precipitated an anti-Muslim sentiment in the country (Zoll).

However, the exact number of the Muslim-American population is not that significant if one’s purpose is to fully understand the Muslim-American

community and examine how it has assimilated and contributed to the economic and social development of the United States. They could be over six million or less than two million - what is more important is the quality and the extent of their contribution as well as their desire to exert a sustained effort aimed at increasing the same. Considering the effects of the 9/11 attacks, the commitment of Muslim-Americans to peace and development in the country acquires greater significance.

Profile

Almost 80% of Muslim Americans are between 16 and 65 years of age. They belong to households with an average membership of five, suggesting a family-oriented culture. Majority of these families live in cosmopolitan centers: California has the highest concentration of Muslim-Americans with 20%, followed by the state of New York (16%), Illinois (8%), and 4% each for the states of Indiana and New Jersey. Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia each account for three percent of all Muslim-Americans.

The fact that they are found in multiethnic and multicultural communities indicates that Muslim-Americans do not have difficulty in living with people with different backgrounds and persuasions. Not all Muslim-Americans are Arabs. In fact, only a minority of about 12% are of Arab descent while 24% originated from South Asia, the majority (42%) being African-Americans. Sixty-seven percent of all Muslim-Americans are immigrants and/or descendants of immigrants. In addition, around 30% of all African-American inmates in the country's penitentiaries are either Muslims or Muslim converts (Mujahid).

Most of the Muslim-Americans are professionals with only a very few venturing in private business. However, the professionals are versatile, making their contributions from different fields. Many of them are serving under the United States Armed Forces. As a matter of fact, the number of Muslim-American servicemen exceeds one percent of the entire population of the armed services of the country. Some - more than 10% - are in the computer and engineering industries, another 8% are employed in the medical field, and some 4% have ventured in the financial field (Mujahid).

The Muslim-Americans are not an impoverished people. Although national figures are not currently available, the average income of a Muslim-American household in the state of Illinois was found to be \$53, 500,. with the Arab Muslims earning the highest average income of \$69, 000 and the African-American Muslims earning a lower \$32, 000 a year (Mujahid). In other words, they are good contributors not only to the coffers of the state and federal governments in terms of income taxes but also to private business as far as their purchasing power is concerned, underlying their significant contribution to the overall economy of the country.

As a matter of fact, as shown by a study conducted recently by the Detroit-based JWT Advertising, reportedly the biggest advertising company in the country, the purchasing power of the Muslim-American community in the country is estimated at around \$170 billion. This is the reason why JWT Advertising is now collaborating with other organizations to assist them in capturing their share of the rather large business of the Muslim-American community.

To achieve this objective, the business firms in the Detroit area are now making use of the different aspects of the Muslim culture to win over Muslim customers. In fact, according to the director of trends spotting of JWT, Ann Mack, “ Some marketers - - I am not going to name them specifically - are having Ramadan advertisements,” she says, “ and because they are speaking specifically to these populations, they will appeal, they will resonate and those consumers will tend to gravitate towards these brands” (Elshinnawe).

Some companies have been treating this issue seriously. IKEA, a Swedish company engaged in the furniture business even sought the help of the chairman of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce. When consulted, Nasser Baydoun recalled that “ What we were able to do was to teach them how to market to our community.—how does our community get its information, how do they choose which store they go to and how does IKEA create a working staff that is friendly to the community.”

Based on this advice, IKEA put together a diversity training program for all its employees, started talking about the needs of Muslims, and required its designers to adapt their product designs to fit the needs and tastes of the Muslim community. All of these changes were aimed specifically at ensnaring the market offered by the Muslim-American community (Elshinnawe).

Programs and practices

The community takes care of its basic needs. Their religious and educational needs are being served by around 3, 000 Islamic centers and mosques scattered all over the country, approximately 500 Islamic Sunday schools, at <https://assignbuster.com/muslims-in-america/>

least 200 Islamic schools and six schools of higher learning. The members of the community are active in spreading the shahadah. In the Illinois area alone, a significant growth was observed. Twenty-five percent of new Muslims in the state came from conversion from other faiths. The Islamic practice of Friday prayers is, however, observed by only about four percent of the community.

Observers could not be certain whether this indicates a low religiosity among the Muslims, or whether this is due to the fact that Muslims are not being given a day off from their work to enable them to attend the Friday prayer. As far as tithing is concerned, it is estimated that about \$100 million is collected from Muslims every year to go to the coffers of their favored relief organizations for the purpose of helping the less fortunate. Fasting during the month of Ramadan, on the other hand, is practiced by an estimated 47% of the Muslim community (Mujahid).

Muslim American Society (MAS)

The MAS is a “charitable, religious, social, cultural, and educational, not-for-profit organization.” It is part of a movement which called on Muslims all over the world to make Islam their “total way of life.” In the United States, it traces its root to the Muslim Student Association (MSA) which was established in 1963 to serve the needs of students and immigrants arriving in the country during the later part the 1950s and the early 1960s.

After twenty years, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) emerged from the MAS. By 1992, the Muslim American Society was organized to provide better outreach programs and serve the increasing needs of Muslim-

Americans. Its mission statement is: “ To build an integrated empowerment process for the American Muslim community through civiceducation, participation, community outreach, andcoalitionbuilding; to forge positive relationships with other institutions outside of our community, that will ensure and facilitate the protection ofcivil rightsand liberties for American Muslims and all Americans” (Muslim American Society).

The MAS, therefore, is the best evidence of the Muslim-Americans’ desire to fully integrate with the American society and do their best in protecting not only the rights of Muslims but Americans in general, particularly against the negative effects ofterrorism. As FBI Director Robert S. Mueller said in a briefing held on February 17, 2004: "...at the outset, I should mention that the Muslim American ... communities in the United States have contributed a great deal to our success. And on behalf of the FBI, I would like to thank these communities for their assistance and for their ongoing commitment to preventing acts of terrorism."

Works Cited

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